

1 obvious to combine the references to achieve an invention equivalent to that defined by applicants'
2 claims. Applicants respectfully disagree for the following reasons.

3 Because dependent claims are patentable for at least the same reasons as the independent
4 claim from which they ultimately depend, applicants will limit the remarks in the present response to
5 pointing out how independent Claims 1, 23, 25, and 26 distinguish over the cited art. Note that
6 Claims 2-8 and 12 are all ultimately dependent on independent Claim 1; and Claim 24 is dependent
7 on independent Claim 23. However, it must be emphasized that while applicants choose not to
8 address other specific differences between the art cited and each of the dependent claims, these
9 differences clearly do exist and are not taught or suggested by the art cited. It is therefore applicants'
10 position that all of the dependent claims recite subject matter that differs in a non-obvious way from
11 the disclosure of the prior art cited.

12 With respect to the rejection of Claims 1-8 and 12, and 25, applicants note that independent
13 Claim 1 recites the following elements:

14 (a) a flexible substrate having a rear surface and a front surface, and
15 including a plurality of flexible conductive traces, said plurality of flexible conductive
16 traces being adapted to connect to an electrical system of a vehicle to receive an
17 electrical current therefrom, said plurality of flexible conductive traces being disposed
in at least one of the following locations:

- 18 (i) on the rear surface of the flexible substrate;
19 (ii) on the front surface of the flexible substrate; and
20 (iii) within an internal portion of the flexible substrate;

21 (b) a plurality of solid-state light emitting devices mounted in a
22 spaced-apart array on the front surface of the flexible substrate, said array extending in
23 two orthogonal directions, said plurality of solid-state light emitting devices being
24 electrically connected to the plurality of flexible conductive traces and energized by
the electrical current, emitting light outwardly and away from said flexible substrate;
and

25 (c) a transparent flexible envelope that extends over the plurality of
26 solid-state light emitting devices, providing protection against abrasion, the light
27 emitted by the plurality of solid-state light emitting devices passing through the
28 transparent flexible envelope, said transparent flexible envelope not covering the rear
29 surface of the flexible substrate, so that the rear surface of the flexible substrate is
30 adapted to mount on an exterior surface of a vehicle, said flexible substrate, said
spaced-apart array, and said transparent flexible envelope being able to conform to a
non-planar curve of the exterior surface.

31 To paraphrase, Claim 1 recites a flexible substrate that (1) has flexible conductors disposed
32 either on the rear surface of the flexible substrate, on the front surface of the flexible substrate, or
33 within an internal portion of the flexible substrate; (2) has a two dimensional orthogonal array of light
34 sources mounted on the front surface of the flexible substrate, such that light is emitted outwardly and
35 away from the flexible substrate; and, (3) has a flexible envelope that covers the array, but not the

1 rear surface of the flexible substrate. Parker and Goodrich disclose flexible substrates, but neither the
2 flexible substrate disclosed by Parker, nor the flexible substrate disclosed by Goodrich is equivalent
3 to the flexible substrate claimed by applicants.

4 First, there is no teaching or suggestion by Parker of a flexible substrate that includes flexible
5 conductors disposed on the rear surface of the flexible substrate, on the front surface of the flexible
6 substrate, or within an internal portion of the flexible substrate. Note that flexible printed circuit 19
7 disclosed by Parker is disposed *adjacent* to the rear surface of flexible substrate, but not *on* the rear
8 surface. As described by Parker, the flexible printed circuit 19 cannot be disposed on the flexible
9 substrate, because if it were, the ability to turn circuits on and off by depressing buttons 5 to
10 controllably cause panel 8 (i.e. the flexible substrate) to contact the flexible circuit would be lost.
11 Thus, modifying the position of flexible printed circuit 19 so that the flexible printed circuit is
12 disposed on the rear surface of the flexible substrate would result in a non functional apparatus that is
13 incapable of carrying out the function for which it was intended. MPEP 2143.01 specifically provides
14 that "if proposed modification would render the prior art invention being modified unsatisfactory for
15 its intended purpose, then there is no suggestion or motivation to make the proposed modification."

16 Parker discloses other conductors, such as those that connect light sources 9 to a power source.
17 However, such conductors cannot be considered to be disposed on the rear surface of the flexible
18 substrate, on the front surface of the flexible substrate, or within an internal portion of the flexible
19 substrate. Parker clearly teaches that light sources 9 are disposed along the edges of the flexible light
20 panels, such that the conductors extend away from the flexible substrate. There is no disclosure that
21 the conductors coupling light sources 9 actually contact the flexible substrate.

22 Further, the flexible substrates disclosed by Parker (i.e., panels 21, 24, and 26) are not
23 equivalent to the flexible substrates defined in applicants' claims, because none of the prior art
24 flexible substrates have light sources that are mounted *onto* the front surface of the flexible substrate.
25 Also, none of the flexible substrates disclosed by Parker have light sources that are mounted in the
26 two dimensional orthogonal array, as recited by applicants' claims. The flexible substrates disclosed
27 by Parker also do not include light sources that emit light outwardly and away from the flexible
28 substrates. Note that only light sources 9, not light sources 31, are actually mounted to the flexible
29 substrates disclosed by Parker. Thus, even though light sources 31 are in an orthogonal array
30 extending in two directions, those light sources are not equivalent to the light sources recited in
31 applicants' claims, because light sources 31 in the Parker disclosure *are not* mounted onto the
32 flexible substrate. It should therefore be apparent that the flexible substrates disclosed by Parker are
33 not equivalent to the flexible substrate recited in Claim 1.

34 Goodrich discloses flexible substrate 4, on which an array of LEDs 3 is disposed. However,
35 light transmissive envelope 1 covers both the front *and rear surface* of flexible substrate 4. Thus, the

1 flexible substrate disclosed by Goodrich is not equivalent to the flexible substrate recited by applicants
2 in Claim 1, because the claim recites that the rear surface of the flexible substrate is not covered by the
3 flexible envelope.

4 For the combination of Goodrich and Parker to achieve an invention equivalent to that defined
5 by applicants' Claim 1, the flexible substrate disclosed by Goodrich would need to be modified so that
6 the flexible envelope does not cover the rear surface of the flexible substrate. The resulting panel
7 would then need to be employed in place of panels 21, 24, or 26 of Parker. However, there does not
8 appear to be any basis for concluding that the required modification of Goodrich would be obvious to a
9 person of ordinary skill, or that it would be obvious to use such a modified flexible light panel in the
10 invention of Parker. There is simply no motivation to make the modification and to combine the
11 references cited to achieve the invention of Claim 1 in the present application.

12 Goodrich discloses a flexible substrate that is fully encapsulated by a PVC encasement.
13 Goodrich's light panel is mounted using suction cups disposed on the front of the light panel. Indeed,
14 encapsulating the entire flexible substrate with a PVC encasement material provides better support.
15 Since Goodrich explicitly teaches that a feature of his invention is its ability to be self supporting,
16 modifying the PVC encasement so that the rear surface of the flexible substrate is not supported by the
17 PVC encasement is contrary to Goodrich's objective and teaching, because such a modification would
18 clearly reduce the light panel's ability to be self supporting. The only basis for modifying Goodrich in
19 such a fashion appears to be hindsight in view of applicants' claimed invention, which does not
20 represent a valid basis for supporting a *prima facie* case of obviousness.

21 To establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness, three basic criteria must be met. First, there
22 must be some suggestion or motivation, either in the references themselves or in the knowledge
23 generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, to modify the reference(s) or to combine
24 reference teachings to produce the claimed invention. Second, there must be a reasonable
25 expectation of success in making such a combination. Finally, the prior art reference (or references
26 when combined) must teach or suggest all elements or steps recited in the claim. *In Re Vaeck*, 947
27 F.2d 488, 20 USPQ2d 1438 (Fed. Cir. 1991). Further, with respect to determining obviousness,
28 MPEP § 2141 indicates that the following basic considerations must be adhered to:

- 29 (A) The claimed invention must be considered as a whole;
30 (B) The references must be considered as a whole and must suggest the
31 desirability and thus the obviousness of making the combination;
32 (C) The references must be viewed without the benefit of impermissible
33 hindsight vision afforded by the claimed invention; and
34 (D) Reasonable expectation of success is the standard with which obviousness
35 is determined.

1 For the reasons set forth below, applicant submits that the prior art fails to establish a *prima facie*
2 basis for the rejection of the claims.

3 There does not appear to be any motivation, either in the references themselves or in the
4 knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, that would lead one of ordinary skill
5 to modify Goodrich to achieve a flexible substrate that includes a protective envelope, which does not
6 cover the rear surface of the flexible substrate. As is made clear in MPEP § 2141, the references
7 must be viewed without the benefit of impermissible hindsight vision afforded by the claimed
8 invention. Other than hindsight, there does not appear to be any reason or motivation to modify
9 Goodrich's device so that the protective envelope does not cover the rear of the flexible substrate.
10 Applicants specifically teach that an adhesive is preferably employed to couple the rear surface of the
11 flexible substrate to the surface of a vehicle. Therefore, it is not desirable for the protective envelope
12 to cover the rear surface, which would cause the panel to be less flexible and less able to conform to a
13 curved surface. Goodrich discloses suction cups mounted onto a front surface of the protective
14 envelope, to enable the flexible LED panels to be mounted to a vertical surface. No other mounting
15 orientation is suggested, and it is not clear why it would be obvious to use an adhesive to mount the
16 rear surface of the Goodrich panel directly to a vehicle.

17 There also does not appear to be any motivation, either in the references themselves or in the
18 knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, to combine reference teachings to
19 produce the claimed invention. Note that to achieve the present invention, the flexible panels
20 disclosed by Parker need to be replaced by the flexible panels disclosed by Goodrich (modified as
21 described above). Replacing the panels disclosed by Parker (which are illuminated by light sources
22 directing light *into* the panel, and light sources disposed *behind* the panel) with Goodrich's panels
23 (which include light sources mounted on a front surface of the panel and direct light outward and
24 away from the panel) appears to directly contradict MPEP 2143.01, which specifically provides that
25 "if the proposed modification or combination of the prior art would change the principle of operation
26 of the prior art invention being modified, then the teachings of the references are not sufficient to
27 render the claims *prima facie* obvious." The relevant section from the MPEP is provided below.

28 THE PROPOSED MODIFICATION CANNOT CHANGE THE PRINCIPLE
29 OF OPERATION OF A REFERENCE

30 If the proposed modification or combination of the prior art would change the
31 principle of operation of the prior art invention being modified, then the
32 teachings of the references are not sufficient to render the claims *prima facie*
33 obvious. *In re Ratti*, 270 F.2d 810, 123 USPQ 349 (CCPA 1959) (Claims were
34 directed to an oil seal comprising a bore engaging portion with outwardly
35 biased resilient spring fingers inserted in a resilient sealing member. The

1 primary reference relied upon in a rejection based on a combination of
2 references disclosed an oil seal wherein the bore engaging portion was
3 reinforced by a cylindrical sheet metal casing. Patentee taught the device
4 required rigidity for operation, whereas the claimed invention required
5 resiliency. The court reversed the rejection holding the "suggested combination
6 of references would require a substantial reconstruction and redesign of the
7 elements shown in [the primary reference] as well as a change in the basic
8 principle under which the [primary reference] construction was designed to
9 operate." 270 F.2d at 813, 123 USPQ at 352.).

10 The principle of operation of Parker's panels is that light is emitted from the panel because
11 light sources 9 are disposed on edge surfaces, and are oriented to direct light inward into the panel.
12 Parker's panels include light transition regions and light extracting deformities (see column 7,
13 lines 15-59). Parker never suggests or employs light sources disposed on a front surface of the panel
14 so that light is directed outwardly and away from the panel. The array of light sources 31 disclosed
15 by Parker direct light *through* the illuminated panel, and those light sources are not mounted *onto* the
16 illuminated panel.

17 In contrast, the principle of operation of Goodrich's panels is that light sources are disposed
18 on a front surface of the panel so that light is directed outwardly and away from the panel. Replacing
19 the panels disclosed by Parker with a panel disclosed by Goodrich would change the principle of
20 operation of Parker with respect to how light is emitted from an illuminated panel. According to
21 MPEP 2143.01, such a combination represents a modification that is not sufficient to produce a *prima*
22 *facie* case of obviousness.

23 Because there appears to be no basis for modifying Goodrich's panels as required except
24 through hindsight, and because a combination of Goodrich and Parker changes the principle of
25 operation of the Parker reference, the cited art is not sufficient to achieve a *prima facie* case of
26 obviousness with respect to claim 1. Since dependent claims are patentable for at least the same
27 reasons as claims from which they depend, all claims ultimately dependent on Claim 1 are also
28 patentable. Accordingly, the rejection of Claims 1-8 and 12 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being
29 unpatentable over Parker in view of Goodrich should be withdrawn.

30 Referring now to Claim 23, applicants note that Claim 23 recites a method of using a flexible
31 substrate having the structural properties recited in Claim 1. Thus, Claim 23 also includes the
32 elements of a flexible substrate having an upper and a lower surface, the lower surface being mounted
33 to a vehicle, and an array of light emitting devices that are mounted to the upper surface of the
34 flexible substrate, such that light emitted from the array is directed outwardly and away from the
35 flexible substrate. A protective cover overlies the light sources, but not the lower surface of the
flexible substrate. Electric conductors are disposed on at least the upper surface, the lower surface, or
inside the flexible substrate. The cited art cannot support a *prima facie* case of obviousness in regard

1 to the recitation of Claim 23, for the same reasons discussed above with respect to Claim 1 (i.e.
2 because the only basis for modifying Goodrich's panels appears to be hindsight, and because the
3 suggested combination of Goodrich and Parker improperly changes the principle of operation of the
4 Parker reference). Since dependent claims are patentable for at least the same reasons as claims from
5 which they depend, Claim 24, which depends from Claim 23, is also patentable. Accordingly, the
6 rejection of Claims 23 and 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Parker in view of
7 Goodrich should be withdrawn.

8 Turning now to Claims 25 and 26, each recites a flexible light panel for use on an external
9 surface of a vehicle. The flexible panels each include a flexible substrate having an upper and lower
10 surface, an array of light devices disposed on the upper surface to emit light outwardly and away
11 from the flexible substrate, and a protective cover that extends over the light sources, but not over the
12 lower surface of the flexible substrate. As discussed in detail above, the flexible panels disclosed by
13 Parker are not equivalent because the light sources disclosed by Parker are not mounted on the front
14 or upper surface of the flexible substrate, to emit light outwardly and away from the flexible
15 substrate. The flexible panel disclosed by Goodrich is not equivalent to applicants' claimed invention
16 because Goodrich's panels have an encapsulating envelope that covers all surfaces of the flexible
17 substrate, front and rear. The cited art cannot support a *prima facie* case of obviousness because the
18 only basis for modifying Goodrich's panels appears to be hindsight, and because the suggested
19 combination of Goodrich and Parker improperly changes the principle of operation of the Parker
20 reference with respect to how light is emitted from the panels (i.e., outwardly and away from the
21 flexible substrate in the instant claims, rather than into or from behind as disclosed by Parker).
22 Accordingly, the rejection of Claims 25 and 26 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over
23 Parker in view of Goodrich should be withdrawn.

24 Rejected of Claims 13-17, 19, 20 and 22 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

25 The Examiner has rejected Claims 13-17, 19, 20 and 22 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being
26 unpatentable over Parker (U.S. Patent No. 5,895,115) in view of Goodrich (U.S. Patent
27 No. 5,162,696), further in view of Bennion (U.S. Patent No. 4,774,434). The Examiner indicates that
28 it would have been obvious to incorporate the negative and positive traces disclosed by Bennion into
29 the combination of Parker and Goodrich applied as discussed above, thus achieving an equivalent
30 invention. Applicants respectfully disagree for the following reasons.

31 Claim 13 recites a flexible panel for mounting to an exterior surface of a vehicle. The recited
32 panel includes a flexible substrate having positive and negative flexible conductive traces, which are
33 used to energize a plurality of solid-state light emitting devices mounted on the outer surface of the
34 flexible substrate in a spaced-apart array extending in two orthogonal directions. The light emitting
35 devices are disposed such that when energized, they emit light outwardly and away from the flexible

1 substrate. A flexible cover overlies the plurality of solid-state light emitting devices, but does not
2 overlie a rear surface of said flexible substrate.

3 Parker does not disclose an equivalent flexible substrate, because the light sources disclosed
4 by Parker are not oriented to emit light outwardly and away from the flexible substrate. Because any
5 change to the operating principle controlling how light is emitted from Parker's flexible panels is
6 prohibited per MPEP 2143.01 (which specifically provides that "if the proposed modification or
7 combination of the prior art would change the principle of operation of the prior art invention being
8 modified, then the teachings of the references are not sufficient to render the claims *prima facie*
9 obvious), it would not be obvious to modify Parker as suggested by the Examiner, to achieve the
10 present claimed invention.

11 Goodrich discloses a flexible substrate that is fully encapsulated by a PVC encasement. There
12 appears to be no basis other than hindsight to modify Goodrich to achieve an envelope that doesn't cover
13 the rear of the flexible substrate. In the recited invention, the encapsulating envelope does not extend to a
14 rear surface of the flexible substrate, so that panel remains flexible and so that the rear surface can be
15 coated with an adhesive and attached to a vehicle, as is described in applicant's specification. Goodrich's
16 light panel is mounted using suction cups disposed on the front of the light panel. Indeed, encapsulating
17 the entire flexible substrate with a PVC encasement material provides a greater amount of support –
18 which makes the panel to inflexible to achieve the conforming fit to the exterior curved surface of a
19 vehicles as required for applicants' invention. Goodrich explicitly teaches that a feature of his invention
20 is its ability to be self supporting. Therefore, modifying the PVC encasement so that the rear surface of
21 the flexible substrate is not supported by the PVC encasement is contrary to Goodrich's objective and
22 teachings, as such a modification would clearly reduce the light panel's ability to be self supporting. The
23 only basis for modifying Goodrich in such a fashion appears to be hindsight, which does not represent a
24 valid basis for supporting a *prima facie* case of obviousness.

25 Bennion does not disclose light emitting devices mounted on the outer surface of the flexible
26 substrate in a spaced-apart array extending in two orthogonal directions. There does not appear to be
27 any basis for concluding that it would be obvious to modify Bennion's logo/decorative type design as
28 shown in FIGURE 4 to achieve the recited spaced-apart array extending in two orthogonal directions.
29 The recited array does not appear to have any decorative utility, and as such modifying Bennion's
30 decorative design to achieve the recited array would render Bennion's device unsuitable for its
31 intended purpose, i.e. to provide a lighted decorative design on an article of clothing such as a T-shirt.

32 Clearly, none of the art cited discloses a flexible substrate having a spaced-apart array
33 (extending in two orthogonal directions) of light sources encapsulated by a protective coating
34 mounted to its upper surface, such that the light sources emit light outwardly and away from the
35 flexible substrate, with no protective coating covering the rear surface of the flexible substrate.

1 Further, modifying any of the cited art to achieve the recited invention appears to be contrary
2 to the disclosure of each reference. As noted above, the required modification to Parker appears to
3 violate MPEP 2143.01, because such a modification would change the disclosed operative principle
4 that Parker employs to illuminate a panel. The required modification to Goodrich also appears to
5 violate MPEP 2143.01, because such a modification would result in a display less capable of being self
6 supporting, and the modification would result in a display unsuitable for its intended purpose. Finally,
7 modifying the decorative lighted design of Bennion appears to violate MPEP 2143.01, because such a
8 modification would result in a display having an array not suitable for decorative purposes. Claim 13 is
9 therefore patentable over the cited art. Since dependent claims are patentable for at least the same
10 reasons as claims from which they depend, all claims ultimately dependent on Claim 13 are also
11 patentable. Accordingly, the rejection of Claims 13-17, 19, 20 and 22 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as
12 being unpatentable over Parker in view of Goodrich, further in view of Bennion should be
13 withdrawn.

14 In consideration of the preceding Remarks, it will be apparent that all claims in this
15 application are patentable. The Examiner is therefore requested to pass this application to Issue
16 without further delay. In the event that any issues remain unresolved, the Examiner is invited to
17 telephone applicants' attorney at the number listed below.

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19 Respectfully submitted,

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25 I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the U.S. Postal Service in a sealed
26 envelope as first class mail with postage thereon fully prepaid addressed to: Director of Patents and
27 Trademarks, Arlington, VA 22202, on October 11, 2002.

28 Date: October 11, 2002
29 RMA/MCK:

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